DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 254 881 CS 504 864

AUTHOR Marsh, D. T.
TITLE Effective Listening Skills. Coombe Lodge Working Paper. Information Bank Number 1463.
INSTITUTION Further Education Staff Coll., Blagdon (England).
PUB DATE Feb 30
NOTE 10p.
AVAILABLE FROM The Futher Education Staff College, Librarian, Coombe Lodge, Blagdon, Bristol, BS18 6RG, England.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication Skills; Counseling Techniques; Interaction; *Interpersonal Communication; *Interpersonal Competence; *Listening; Listening Habits; *Listening Skills; Problem Solving
IDENTIFIERS Self Awareness

ABSTRACT

Successful interpersonal skills depend largely on skill in communication. The principal concern in the process of transmission, attending to, understanding, and accepting is attending--listening effectively and positively. Listening is a difficult skill and, for a variety of reasons, is not a natural state for most people. Self-awareness is the first step to developing listening skills. Some behaviors that indicate listening include reflecting, disagreeing, clarifying, confirming, and nonverbal signs. Some behavioral characteristics are effective, some are not, and some may even be negative in that they block any listening at all. Communication in a problem solving situation is difficult because people do not always feel free to say what they really mean. Responses that can facilitate problem solving include door openers, passive listening, acknowledgement responses, and active listening. Facilitative behaviors in a counseling situation include (1) seeking feelings, (2) seeking information, (3) reflecting feelings, (4) testing interpretations, (5) encouraging continuity, (6) agreeing, (7) expressing feelings, (8) giving information, and (9) giving interpretation. When listening to someone else, it is possible to hear not only the content of what is being said, but also the feelings and underlying motivation. Understanding and acceptance can occur only after successful attending. (HTH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Coombe Lodge
Working Paper

Information
Bank Number

1463

JC

ED254881

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

EFFECTIVE LISTENING SKILLS

Contents

1. The Communication Process
2. Developing the Skills
3. Characteristics of Effective Listening
4. A Counselling Approach

(This paper is designed to complement "Managing Effective Relations" (IBN 1420), "Conflict Resolution" (IBN 1402) "Assertiveness for People & Organisations" (IBN 1462), and the series on "Interpersonal Skills in Further Education" by C.M. Turner)

D.T. Marsh
Staff Tutor
February 1980

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D. T. Marsh

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS504864

This paper is provided for the purposes of discussion and study.
The views and policies contained in it are not necessarily those of the Further Education Staff College.
Further copies or permission to reproduce this paper may be obtained from: The Librarian, The Further Education Staff College, Coombe Lodge, Blagdon, Bristol BS18 6RG. Tel: 0761 - 62503.

© The Further Education Staff College, 1980

EFFECTIVE LISTENING SKILLS

1. The Communication Process

Successful inter-personal skills depend largely on skill in communication, in interaction. The process of transmission, attending to, understanding, and accepting is fraught with problems:

PROCESS	PROBLEMS
A transmits a message to B	Has A clear objectives? chosen the right medium? chosen the right code? (who will hear it? In what circumstances? How will it be heard? What unintended effects are possible?)
B attends to the message	Does he 'hear' it? Does he listen to it?
B understandsthe message	How does he hear it? What effects have his attitudes, experiences, et al? Has he clearly understood?
B accepts the message	Is it accepted totally? Is it acted upon?

The particular concern in this process is 'attending', that is listening effectively and positively. Listening is a difficult, sophisticated skill acquired through conscious development and turned into a smooth response by practice; to be a good listener is not a natural state.

Unfortunately, most people to whom we talk do not want to listen, usually because:

* They think they have something better to say;
* They already have the answer to what they know to be the problem;
* They have no reason or motive to listen;
* They do not like us or what we represent or what we have to say;
* They comprehend more quickly than we can speak;
* They are filtering the message;
* They are thinking about what they are going to say next;
* Talking is 'action': listening is 'inactive' (good managers are active);
* They are distracted or they have more immediate problems.

Occasionally, some listening does occur, usually because:

* The speaker is liked or admired;
* He has something to say;
* There are rewards or punishments involved;
* A response might be expected;
* The speaker might say something which can be used later;
* There are no other distractions;
* The listener is consciously trying to listen.

2. Developing the Skills

The first step, as usual, is that of self-awareness. How are some questions worth investigation in all communication situations:

1. Do I help or hinder the others to express themselves? Do I free or bind them?
2. If I free, how precisely? If I bind, how precisely?
3. Can I change my degree of listening from casual, social interaction across to helping someone with a real problem?
4. Is everyone else too long-winded? Do I have to interrupt frequently for some reason? How patient am I?
5. Do I feel easy when I have to listen?
6. Am I aware of the other's emotions? Or am I only aware of my own feelings? How do I 'read' the emotions of others?
7. Am I aware of what is not said? Do I know what it means (for me and the other)?
8. Do I ever check that what I am hearing is what is said?
9. How do I know when the other is not listening?
10. How is the other likely to know when I am not really listening?

Secondly, we can observe other people and draw conclusions about what is effective, what is not. Here are 10 behaviours which indicate listening:

1. REFLECTING	Let me see if I've got your point.... Are you saying....?
2. SUPPORTING	Yes, good idea. And then? So?
3. DISAGREEING	Won't that cost too much?
4. CONSTRUCTING	Would it help if we....? What would you like to happen?
5. CRITICISING	If we do this for him, we'll have to do it for everybody else....
6. CLARIFYING	Isn't the point that....
7. INTERPRETING	Are you really suggesting....?
8. CONFIRMING	So, we agree that....
9. TESTING	Would it be right to say that.... If we did this, then....?
10. NON-VERBAL SIGNS	Nodding, grunting, eyes open, shaking head, etc.

Obviously, some are more effective than others, some more positive. We can identify certain characteristics which are effective and some which are not or even negative in that they block any listening at all.

3. Characteristics of Effective Listening

These can be summarised as:

Ineffective	Effective
Non-Verbal Behaviour	
Listener looks bored, uninterested or judgmental; avoids eye contact; displays distracting mannerisms (doodles, plays with a paper clip, reads papers, etc.)	Listener maintains positive posture; avoids distracting mannerisms; keeps attention focused on speaker; maintains eye contact; nods and smiles when appropriate
Focus of Attention	
Listener shifts focus of attention to himself; "When something like that happened to me, I...."	Listener keeps focus of her comments on the speaker; "When that happened, what did you do?" How did you feel?"
Acceptance	
Listener fails to accept speaker's ideas and feelings; "I think it would have been better to...."	Listener accepts ideas and feelings; "That's an interesting idea, can you say more about it?"
Empathy	
Listener fails to emphathize; "I don't see why you felt that...."	Listener empathizes; "So when that happened, you felt angry."
Probing	
Listener fails to probe into an area, to follow up an idea or feeling	Listener probes in a helpful way (but does not cross examine); "Could you tell me more about that? Why did you feel that way?"; listener follows up; "A few minutes ago you said that...."
Paraphrasing	
Listener fails to check the accuracy of communication by restating in his own words important statements made by the speaker	Listener paraphrases at the appropriate time
Summarizing	
Listener fails to summarize	Listener summarizes the progress of the conversation from time to time
Advise	
Listener narrows the range of alternatives by suggesting a "correct" course of action	Listener broadens the range of ideas by suggesting (or asking the speaker for) a number of alternatives

4. A Counselling Approach

Listening is a skill which helps other people to solve problems. Communication in this instance is difficult because people don't always feel free to say what they really mean (or want to), they are not always in touch with their feelings, and feelings are hard to put into words. We need to develop responses that facilitate problem solving. There are four basic responses:

1. Door Openers The listener picks up the clue and sends an invitation:

   Would you like to talk about it?
   I'd be interested to hear how you feel?
   Would it help to talk about it?
   I've got the time if you have. Want to talk?

2. Passive Listening Quite simply, shut up and listen. Silence is a potent tool for getting people to talk about what is bothering them. Silence is not necessarily acceptance of the message. If you really have to say something simply reflect the speaker's words for further clarification.

   A: I feel bad about this.
   B: Bad?

3. Acknowledgement Responses Occasional acknowledgements are useful and necessary ranging from nodding, to 'oh', 'mmm', 'I understand', 'yes', 'interesting', 'really', etc.

4. Active Listening The characteristics of effective listening already summarised represent active listening. They involve empathy and acceptance working from the base 'People are important; I'm important, you're important' the classic T.A. I'm OK - You're OK life position. Active listening is saying:

   I hear what you are feeling
   I understand how you are seeing things now
   I see you as you are now
   I am interested and concerned
   I have no desire to change you
   I do not judge or evaluate you
   You don't have to feel afraid of any censure

These free the speaker. Road blocks, or binders, include the following:

1. Ordering, directing, commanding;
2. Warning, admonishing, threatening;
3. Moralising, preaching, imploring;
4. Advising, giving suggestions, or solutions;
5. Persuading with logic, lecturing, arguing;
6. Judging, criticising, disagreeing, blaming;

7. Ridiculing;
8. Interpreting, analysing, diagnosing;
9. Interrogating;
10. Distracting, directing.

These represent a desire to change as opposed to accept the sender of the message. They are vehicles of unacceptance when the other owns the problem. He must define it, accept it, and solve it. The listener can only help him find his own solutions by facilitative listening, by being a sounding board, by using counselling skills. (If you own the problem then you become the sender and need to use assertive skills).

In a counselling situation, the following facilitative behaviours have been identified as occurring:

Outline Definitions of Categories
Seeking Feelings: The listener is enquiring about the other person's feelings. Feelings are defined as the basic events of a person's internal environment. This internal environment consists of all those events which occur within, and are exclusive to, the person concerned, and are therefore only available to others from his report. The basic events of a person's internal environment are those which are directly sensed by that person, as opposed to the results of processing the experience (e.g. when the experience is thought about, evaluated or interpreted). Words which express the following all signify feelings: emotions, personal choices, needs and desires, experiential descriptions, physical sensations.
Seeking Information: The listener is enquiring about things other than those already categorised as feelings, e.g. seeking facts (including descriptions of actions), opinions, thoughts, reasons, evaluations, etc.
Reflecting Feelings: The listener tests that he has correctly understood the feelings that the other person has just expressed, verbally or non-verbally, explicitly or implicitly. Reflecting may take the form of a question, an interrogative statement, or an illustrative role-play. It may focus on a specific statement, or it may be a summary, or it may test implications.
Testing Interpretations: The listener uses the form of testing his own understanding to reflect a generalisation or interpretation of the other person's behaviour.
Encouraging Continuity: The listener encourages the other person to carry on talking, without giving any indications as to the content they want to hear about. This is an acknowledgement that the speaker is being listened to and accepted, e.g. 'I see', 'Mhmm', and 'Yes' when not indicating agreement.
Agreeing: The listener agrees with, supports, or explicitly confirms what the other person has said.
Expressing Feelings: The listener directly verbalises his feelings.
Giving Information: The listener gives facts, describes actions, clarification, thoughts, etc.
Giving Interpretation: The listener suggests reasons or explanations for particular behavioural events, in the form of principles which can account for or predict the behaviour.

In Transactional Analysis terms such listening is an attempt by the listener to operate in the Adult ago state and make the transaction complementary, parallel by realigning if necessary the speaker from either a Child or Parent state, thus avoiding wasteful games such as "Ain't it Awful".

In conclusion, remember that when you listen to someone else you can hear, if you want to, not only the content of what is being said, but also the feelings and underlying motivation. Understanding and acceptance can only occur after successful attending.

• • • • •